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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000871

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SUBJECT: TFH01: AMBASSADOR'S CONVERSATION WITH FORMER  
PRESIDENT FLORES

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

11. (C) Summary: The Ambassador met with former president and Liberal Party "godfather" Carlos Flores on August 31 to discuss the political crisis and the state of relations within the Liberal Party. While Flores acknowledged his opposition to the coup had placed distance between himself and de facto president Roberto Micheletti, he said he was still working to bring a resolution to the crisis. Flores noted that there was a growing number of coup supporters who now favored the San Jose Accord, due in large part to the efforts of the US government and the international community. The Ambassador and Flores discussed the role of Micheletti negotiator Arturo Corrales, and how best to harness the growing moderate ranks in time to resolve the crisis. End summary.

12. (C) Former president Carlos Roberto Flores Facusse is one of the most respected and influential figures in the Liberal Party, both by merits of his former office (he was president from 1998 to 2002) and as owner-editor of the daily newspaper "La Tribuna." While Flores is no ally of President Zelaya, he opposed the June 28 coup from the start, understanding better than most in Honduras the strategic damage done to Honduras and Honduran democracy, and even more so to his Liberal Party. Because of his opposition to the coup, he has not been in regular contact with fellow Liberal Micheletti since June 28. But Flores has been working behind the scenes to find a peaceful resolution to the crisis, and spoke with the Ambassador on August 31 about the prospects for reaching a resolution. Flores reiterated his strong support for the San Jose Accord. While he acknowledges the accord lacks clear language on enforcement mechanisms and the process for selecting the unity government, he said these were issues which could be worked out through a weeklong period of discussions once the accord was signed, and should not be treated as an obstacle to signing.

13. (C) Flores noted that while he does not have direct influence over the Micheletti inner circle, a group he describes as hard-line and "uncreative," he explained that there was a growing number of people who were supporters of Zelaya's removal, but who have come around to understand the harm the current crisis has done to the business and political environment. He credited US officials here in Tegucigalpa and in Washington, as well as actions taken by the international community, as playing a major role in this change. Flores said hardliners included: de facto Foreign

Minister Carlos Lopez Contreras, VFM Martha Lorena Alvarado de Casco, Minister of the Presidency Rafael Pineda Ponce, President of Congress Jose Angel Saavedra, and Supreme Court President Jorge Rivera Avila. Flores said coup supporters more open to a resolution included: Micheletti team negotiators Arturo Corrales and Vilma Morales; media owners Rafael Ferrari and Jorge Canahuati; business leaders Camilo Atala, Antonio Tavel, Emilio Larache and Jacobo Katan; and Anti-corruption commissioner Juan Ferrara. Flores encouraged the Ambassador to approach these "moderate" figures and encourage them to press Micheletti to sign the accord. (Note: Flores' list of moderates includes some figures who the Embassy views as continuing to play an unproductive role in the crisis. For example, Jorge Canahuati's newspapers El Heraldo and La Prensa are the most extreme pro-coup publications in the country, for example. End note)

14. (C) The Ambassador noted that he had been in contact with all of Flores' list of moderates, and said he would continue with efforts to get these leaders to press Micheletti to sign the accord. Regarding Micheletti negotiator Corrales, the Ambassador observed that Corrales' constant shifting of positions, especially before and during the OAS foreign ministers' visit to Honduras, and his inability to deliver Micheletti had hurt his credibility with OAS Secretary General Insulza and Costa Rican President Arias. The Ambassador added that with no indications from Micheletti that he is willing to sign the accord, the USG and the international community are losing patience. He said the recent decision to close the nonimmigrant visa section of the Consulate and suspend assistance were signs of this dissatisfaction with the lack of progress, and told Flores he

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should convey to his interlocutors that more such actions are likely if the accord is not signed. Conversely, the Ambassador noted, the United States and others are ready to provide support to ensure that all sides adhere to the accord if signed.

15. (C) Flores closed by stressing that while the Micheletti supporters have done great damage to Honduras and the cause of Honduran democracy, most anti-Zelaya people are not bad, and should not all be punished. He urged that successful elections be seen as a potential path to resolving the crisis and bringing Honduras back into the fold of American democracies.

16. (C) Comment: Flores has been and will continue to be an important influence in favor of resolving the crisis, despite his difficult relationship with Micheletti. He is one of Honduras's most strategic thinkers, understanding the long-term implications this coup has had on the country and the region; his opinion carries much weight with other influential Liberals. We will continue to reach out to those leaders Flores calls moderates, who also have potential to influence the more intransigent Micheletti inner circle. In the end, Micheletti is a politician, and if he perceives his base of support has shifted in favor of the San Jose Accord in a manner he cannot ignore, there is still a chance he can be led to the signing table. End comment.  
LLORENS